

THE

COMMON SCHOOL JOURNAL.

VOL. III.

BOSTON, JANUARY 15, 1841.

No. 2.

ON READING, AND READING BOOKS.

BY WM. A. ALCOTT.

IF I were to engage, once more, in teaching common schools,—and I have sometimes half resolved to do so,—I would willingly have very little to do with books, especially at first. Books indeed I would have, as things of reference ; that is, I would have a well-selected library of school books, in all the branches taught in the schoolroom ; but I should not wish to have much to do with getting lessons from them, in the old way. I would teach much orally, and still more by means of slates. I should like to describe the methods I would pursue, but that is not my present purpose. My object at this time is to say how I would teach reading with the aid of class books ; for if there are some teachers who would willingly lay aside books in teaching reading and spelling, there are but few school committees or proprietors of schools who would be satisfied with such teaching, if, indeed, it would be satisfactory to pupils. The greater part will continue to use books of some sort. As things are, I should probably use them myself, to some extent.

But *what* books? On this point I will only say, at present, that I would do the best I could, all things considered. I would not disturb the peace of the district, or cause divisions, for the sake of introducing a new school book, even though it were a highly improved one. If I could not make innovations of this sort without too much sacrifice, I would do the best I could with the materials before me.

And it is a well-known fact, to those, at least, who have had much experience in this way, that almost any reading book may be made more interesting by a little painstaking on the part of the teacher, than by merely running over its pages in the old humdrum manner.

I will give an example of one method which I have adopted with a view to interest my pupils in their reading lessons, as well as to elicit inquiry, and awake in them the good spirit of a desire for improvement. I select for this purpose the article entitled “The Lost Camel,” from page 33 of “The Village Reader.”* The first paragraph is as follows :—

“A dervis was journeying alone, in the desert, when two merchants

* “The Village Reader” is a duodecimo volume of three hundred pages, designed for the use of schools, and lately published by G. & C. Merriam, of Springfield, Mass. It is neatly printed, on good paper, and in large type—a rare excellence. It is, moreover, happily calculated to exert a good *moral* influence.

suddenly met him. 'You have lost a camel,' said he to the merchants."

Having required one of the pupils of a class to read this paragraph, I would say to them—"Here we are told about a *dervis*; do any of you know what a *dervis* is? I leave it to any of you to answer me."

Perhaps some individual, if the class were large, and if they had ever been required to attend to the sense of their reading lessons, might be able to give a confused account of a *dervis*. The far greater probability, however, is, that not one in a common first class, in a Common School, would know any thing at all about the word, any more than if it had been Greek or Latin. I would not be over forward, however, in the worst case, to express surprise, and, above all, to reproach them for their ignorance. "It is a word," I would say, "which does not very frequently recur in reading; and it is not therefore surprising that some persons should not be very familiar with its meaning." These remarks I should not make to apologize for them, but to soften any rising feelings that I might not wish to encourage or to see manifested. I should tell them, in a simple and intelligible way, what a *dervis* is.

Will it be said, here, that few teachers themselves would know the exact meaning of the term? I grant it, unless they had examined a dictionary; and this is one of the blessings of teaching; it compels us to be accurate. It is well that, in order to teach correctly, we are obliged to have constantly at hand a good English dictionary, and often to resort to it.

And yet even these dictionary definitions are often unsatisfactory both to the teacher and pupils. They often need defining, quite as much as the original word sought for. Take, for example, this very word *dervise*, or *dervis*. According to Webster's octavo dictionary, it is "a Turkish priest or monk, who professes extreme poverty, and leads an austere life." Now, there are many teachers, and still more of their pupils, who would be but little wiser for this definition, without defining the terms which the definition itself involves. Their ideas of the word *monk*, and indeed of the word *priest*, are entirely inadequate; and as for the word *austere*, they have no ideas at all connected with it. To be able to render the pupils of a class at once interested and instructed, in giving the definition of the word *dervis*, the teacher should be able to tell his pupils what a *monk* is, and what it is to lead an *austere* life. He should also be able to tell them something about Mohammedanism, the religion of most of the Turks, as well as about the duties, &c., of its priests.

The word *desert* next occurs. What is a desert? Is it always a mere range, more or less extensive, of dry sand? What is the scriptural meaning of the word *desert*? Where is the largest desert in the world? Where are some other large deserts? Are there any deserts in America? Are there any in the United States? Are there any in New England? In what part of the world was the desert, do you think, in which our *dervis* was travelling? Do men often journey alone in these deserts? What do you know of the more common modes of travelling in these deserts?—Here an account of caravans, &c., might come in; and of camels; and why camels were happily adapted to travelling in deserts; which would prepare the way for what follows.

What is a merchant? Many will smile, I know, at the intimation that the word *merchant* is one which is not readily understood. Yet I am satisfied that not one pupil in ten in our Common Schools has any adequate idea of the true definition of the word *merchant*. When I was a lad, there were, in the town where I resided, two or three small country stores, at which was kept a small assortment of West India and dry goods; and the owners and proprietors of these shops, I called merchants. Had I read, at that time, the story of the "Lost Camel," in the "Village Reader," the word *merchant* would have suggested to my mind the petty kind of dealers with whom I had been acquainted, and no other. Yet how obvious that my idea of a merchant would in this way have been wholly inadequate, not to say wrong! The two merchants in the story of the "Lost Camel" were dealers of a far different description from those with whom I had been familiar.

But my case is not a singular one. It is more or less, as to its general features, the case of children in general. How could it be otherwise? This narrowness of definition, I would, as an instructor, on coming to the word *merchant* in the story above, labor hard to remove, by describing some of the various forms of occupation which come under the general term *merchandizing*.

This preliminary form, and kind of instruction, if pursued in a kindly spirit, and without awakening in the pupils the idea that the teacher is desirous of perplexing or distressing them, and if not carried too far at once, would be of the greatest value, and could hardly fail to prove as interesting to the pupils as beneficial. I have often tried it; indeed I always tried it—that is, daily, during the whole course of my instruction, in later years. The collateral information the pupils thus acquired—to say nothing of their improvement in the mere art of reading—was of the greatest importance. The superiority of pupils thus instructed is obvious, upon the slightest inquiry and examination, and I recommend it to all teachers who may take the trouble to peruse what I have here presented.

[The preface of the "Village Reader," referred to in the above communication, contains the following good "Hints to Teachers:"]

1. Occasionally let each scholar read only to a stop, even if the stop is merely a comma, and let each be careful to leave off with a right inflection of the voice, not letting the voice fall at a comma, if the sense does not require it. Such a practice serves to fix the attention of every scholar upon the lesson, which it is sometimes difficult to secure, when each one knows beforehand, from his position in the class, the paragraph he is to read.

2. Let each member of the class occasionally read the same sentence, and the others criticise the manner of the one who reads.

3. Give out a sentence from the lesson to be read, previous to the exercise, or let each scholar transcribe upon his slate, and indicate the emphatic words by underscoring them, and mark the inflections proper to be used wherever required; or let each transcribe the sentence without inserting the stops, and then, without the aid of the book, apply them properly; or let the sentence be written upon the black-board, one pupil mark it, and the other members of the class criticise his performance.

4. The teacher should rely very much upon his own example as a method of instruction in reading.

5. Accustom scholars to give definitions in their own language, of words, as found in their connection in the sentence."

[The Hon. David Choate, of Essex, a distinguished professional teacher, requires each scholar in the reading class to ask some question or questions, in relation to the subject of the lesson, before the reading is commenced. This insures a previous study of the lesson; for, if not studied, the question, or the answers to inquiries that will arise respecting it, will betray the pupil's ignorance and neglect. Ed.]

COMMON SCHOOLS OF NEW YORK.

[From the Journal of Commerce.]

GENTLEMEN,—The subject alluded to in the subjoined letter, is at this time exciting much public attention, and may give rise to consequences affecting us all in no small degree. It is from a gentleman of talent and high standing in Massachusetts, who, during the past summer, visited some of the schools in this State, with a view to a comparison with those in New England. His statements correspond very closely with those made by myself during a similar investigation a few months since. One of the matters of which he speaks, may prove more interesting to this city than is at present generally anticipated, viz. the working of the DISTRICT SYSTEM; as it has been very strongly intimated that the Secretary of State proposes to recommend, at the next meeting of the Legislature, the application of the same system here; a recommendation, which, if adopted, would result in the total destruction of our public schools, so long the admiration, not only of our own countrymen, but of foreigners from all parts of Europe, who have examined them. Should the letter appear to you as interesting as it does to me, you will be disposed to insert it in your Journal, and thus oblige

Your obedient servant,

J. S. R.

NEW YORK, *November 18, 1840.*

BOSTON, *November 10, 1840.*

MY DEAR SIR,—Ever since your departure from Boston, I have been the subject of a severe influenza, and inflammation of the bronchia, which have incapacitated me for every thing but pressing duties. Nevertheless, I have not ceased to think and feel; and I have been made to do both by the recent proceedings in your State touching education. Regarding this sacred subject as paramount to all others of a temporal nature, my interest in it has lifted me above the political tempest which has been sweeping over the country, and which I have regarded as one would look from the unclouded mountain-top down upon the war of elements below. But, alas! the storm has reached even there; and I see with trembling that party fury is ready to jeopard the dearest interests of the rising and of unborn generations.

Can nothing be done, my dear sir, to make men sensible of the enormity of listening, one moment, to any consideration but the true interests of children, in any political questions which bear in the remotest degree upon education?

I am sure there is too much honor and too much morality in our community, *knowingly* to countenance any measures which would injuriously affect the intellectual or spiritual interests of our posterity, or incapacitate them for forming and maintaining a pure political and spiritual faith.

Men will peril their own commercial and political interests, and sometimes sacrifice them, for party considerations; they will even jeopard those of the whole community; and for this there is the poor excuse that they take part of the consequences upon themselves; but every principle of honor and religion forbids them to peril the interests of their children. If in a future state there be different degrees of remorse for past sin, the difference must be fearfully against him who feels that the dreadful consequences of his own selfish passions have not died with him, but continue exerting a baleful influence on those who, but for him, might have been enlightened and happy.

You have doubtless examined the last Abstracts of School Returns for Massachusetts, and I am sure you have been delighted with the gratifying results there exhibited. There can be no mistake, no humbug there; figures will not lie, nor skepticism itself hesitate about taking the evidence of more than two hundred different School Committees scattered over the State, and entirely unconnected with each other.

All these show that there is an improvement in schoolhouses, an increase of the number of pupils, a diminution of absences, an augmentation of teachers' salaries, a demand for higher qualifications, and a disposition to pay for them; and, *consequently*, a determination to have better schools.

I hope the friends of education in New York will also bestir themselves. There is certainly very great need of it; for, if I can judge by the specimens which I saw in my late visit, your country schools are in a lamentable condition.

I was not at all prepared for such a state of things as I found in Saratoga County, because I thought very highly of your school system, and, on paper, it seemed to me to be working beautifully. But I found that the organization was very imperfect, and that in reality there was little system by which the teachers could be governed. For instance—finding two public schools within a mile from each other, that did not commence at the same hour, I inquired of the teachers the reason of the difference. They replied, “they were sure they did not know; they had been accustomed to do as themselves or the parents thought best.”

Again, with regard to the journal of school proceedings, or the *return* of attendance, absences, &c., there was no rigid rule; some schools had *no printed form at all*; and one female teacher showed me a dirty piece of paper, ruled in crooked lines, and filled with mystical symbols, which she called her return, but which no one except the patient soul herself could have deciphered, and not even she, after it had been laid aside a year.

As for the system of *surveillance*, there seemed to be none of it at all. Most of the teachers spoke of examinations by committees as a thing of very rare occurrence, and upon which they did not count. In some schools, there was absolutely no one to whom, as a matter of any certainty, the teacher seemed to owe any responsibility; for one very amiable and really able teacher told me that although she had been

about two months in her school, I was the very first person who had crossed the threshold, except herself and her scholars ; and she should be surprised if I were not the last for that season ; because she had taught four different schools in the State, and never was visited by any committee, and very seldom by any parents of her pupils.

The good woman might have been teaching them all the time, that the earth was flat ; that kings rule by the grace of God ; that Mahomet was the true prophet ; and been rearing up a brood of young Mussulmen.

Apropos de rien, I heard of one of your committees interfering with a vengeance, and turning out a schoolmaster for committing sundry enormities in the way of illustrating his lessons. It appears that he had enlisted the feelings of his pupils in Natural Philosophy, and tried to get some apparatus, but was told "to do the regular teaching, and leave out the nonsense." But, nothing daunted, he got some apparatus himself, and told the boys if they would bring him a mouse or two, the next day, he would show the effects of nitrogen gas upon them. The next day the committee came, in great wrath, to reprove him, because, forsooth, the boys, in their eagerness to learn, had been up all night trying to catch mice for their master, and disturbing their houses !

He promised to do better ; but when he came to astronomy, he committed a more atrocious crime ; for, being deficient in an orrery, he took the biggest boy in school, and placing him in the middle for the sun, told him how to turn round and round slowly upon his axis, as the sun did ; then he placed a little fellow, for Mercury, next to him ; then a girl, for Venus ; then a representation of the Earth ; then a fiery little fellow for Mars ; and so on, till he got all the planetary system arranged, and explained to each one how fast he was to go, and how many times to turn on his heels as he went round in his orbit.

Then, the signal being given, the sun commenced revolving, and away went the whole team of planets around him, each boy keeping his proper distance from the centre, trotting with the proper velocity in his orbit, and whirling around in due proportion as he performed his revolution. It must have been a rare sight ! and a lesson which the boys long retained ; for do you think, my dear sir, that John, who represented Mercury, would ever forget that he was nearest the sun, and that he had an easy time walking round the stationary lubber in the centre, while Will, who represented Herschel, must have been out of breath in scampering round his orbit ?

But if the boys did not forget the lesson, neither did the master ; they danced, but he paid the piper ; for the committee in great horror dismissed him at once,—he had been teaching, for aught they knew, the dance of the Turkish dervises !

Seriously, my dear sir, if ever you should come across this proscribed illustrator, let me know his address. He must be a rare teacher, and I could find him a place where he would be useful to others and to himself ; where he should have as many mice as he wanted, and an orbit big enough for all his planets to revolve in.

But to return to our subject. I found that the old and very prolific source of evil in our schools,—variety of books,—was even worse in the schools of New York ; and that the confusion produced with us, is with you "*confusion worse confounded*."

The teachers generally acknowledged and lamented this condition

of things, and stated that much time was lost, and that the interest of the schools suffered very materially from this evil, for which they had no remedy.

Another feature of your system struck me very unfavorably ; and as it is almost the only one of the fundamental principles which seems to be effectually carried out, it must be a prolific source of evil.

I speak of the method of assessing the tax upon parents, according to the number of attendances of their children. It appears that an account is kept with every parent, and he is charged with so many half days' attendance every week. His pecuniary interest, therefore, would seem to stand directly in the way of the intellectual interests of his children ; for the arrangement seems like a premium upon absence ; and doubtless many a poor man, when hesitating in the morning whether to take his two or three boys off from a job of work to send them to school, has decided in favor of their absence by reflecting that it would be a sixpence, or a shilling, saved from the school tax.

All the teachers with whom I conversed, admitted that this is the way in which the rule works.

But what shall I say of the schoolhouses which I visited ; of the desks, the seats, &c. ? Hardly any thing ; for I cannot find words to express the feelings which they excite ! I am sure that many farmers, in the erection of accommodations for their horses and their cattle, take more pains to have them suitable to their wants, than is taken for the accommodation of the children in some of the schools of your State.

There is no ventilation ; no means of equalizing temperature ; no consideration of the comfort or health of children in the construction of desks and benches, and no variety in their height and shape to suit the various ages and sizes of the little victims who are impounded there six hours daily.

As for the teachers themselves, and their qualifications for their high calling, I had not formed a very exalted idea of them ; for what could be expected, where the compensation is less than many of our factory girls and domestics obtain ? But in what little I did expect, I was disappointed. I have reason to suppose, from what I saw myself, and what I have learned from others, that the business of teaching is considered the simplest of all business ; as one which needs no preparation, and no previous study ; and that although a young woman who had no experience in a factory, would feel conscientious scruples about undertaking to manage spinning-jennies, she would not hesitate a moment to take charge of fifty human souls, and guide and direct their complicated springs of action. Such are the lamentable negligence and indifference of parents and school committees !

But I have already extended my remarks too far, perhaps ; and I will close by saying that I shall be most happy to correspond with you upon this interesting subject, and impart to you any local information which I can obtain in this neighborhood.

It is an arrangement of Providence as beautiful as it is wise, that children are brought into the world *without habits*. Through these the educator can make the child better than himself.

LECTURE ON THE DUTY OF VISITING SCHOOLS.

Delivered before the American Institute of Instruction, August, 1840.

BY THOMAS A. GREENE, ESQ.

The appropriate duties of teachers, and the best methods of imparting instruction in the various branches of study which are pursued in our colleges and schools, are topics which you will expect to hear discussed at these meetings. They undoubtedly belong to the occasion and the place. They have been amply and ably treated by gentlemen of intelligence and experience, in the lectures and discussions which have been annually delivered before the Institute for the last ten years, and which must have been a source of gratification and profit to all who have enjoyed the privilege of listening to them. The duties of those persons whose business it is to visit our schools, to look after them individually, and to examine carefully into their condition, are scarcely less important. It may, at first view, appear a little out of place to dwell upon this subject here, before an association composed principally of teachers, and established mainly for their improvement. But if there be any members of school committees present,—and I hope there are many such,—if there be any who stand in the relation of parents only to the scholars, an admonition to these may not be out of season, nor given wholly in vain. If it were my province to designate the persons who should take upon themselves the employment of visiting the schools in which the children of the land are educated, I would enlarge the number far beyond that of those who ordinarily discharge this duty. I would, that the places where the young are learning the lessons and imbibing the principles that are to regulate their future lives, and through them to affect the destinies of a whole people, should be vigilantly guarded and watched by many an Argus eye that has not been hitherto, with due attention, fastened upon them. Especially, would I call upon parents frequently to visit the schools where the minds of their children are forming,—upon those men of leisure and education who are willing to bestow a portion of their time on the improvement of the community in which they live,—upon all who are desirous of acting under the obligations of moral and religious duty, of the love of their country and their kind,—to turn their attention to a field in which they will find an abundant harvest, while the laborers are far too few.

Let me, in the first place, address myself to those whose *official* duty it is to perform these services; to those who have been selected to be school committees of our towns, and trustees and visitors of our colleges, academies, and private schools. Are there not too many among these who say, or, if they do not say it in so many words, by their conduct seem to say, that if they attend the business meetings of their respective Boards, and especially if they take care that competent and well-qualified instructors are provided and placed over the different departments of their charge, the most urgent duties of their station are fulfilled? That when the schools have been properly appointed, and furnished with such articles as are required for the necessary comfort and accommodation of teacher and pupil, they may then be suffered to go on without any further personal attention on the part of the committee, except, perhaps, a formal visitation at the commence-

ment, and another near the close of each term, such as a strict fulfilment of the letter of the law may require? But alas! he commits a great mistake who suffers himself to be influenced by considerations like these. The most important duties of his station are yet to be performed. His frequent personal supervision of the school should be felt to be indispensable. Let him go whenever he can be there without neglecting his other engagements, and let him so arrange his other engagements that he may find some time for the discharge of the responsibility he assumed in accepting this trust. If he cannot so arrange his business as to make this possible, he had better decline at once the appointment. For in every town and parish there dwell some who are competent and can find time to discharge the requisite duties of this office. Let such, and such only, attempt to discharge them.

And when entering upon the performance of this high trust, let mind and heart go with him. Let his thoughts and his feelings be there, concentrated within the walls of that schoolhouse, and let all his other concerns remain without the door. Let the compting-room be left, for the time, in the charge of his partner or his clerk; let the client take care, for a little while, of his own concerns; let the patient be trying the efficacy of the remedies already prescribed; and let the apprentice do the best he may upon the task assigned him; while he is, for the present, neither the merchant, the professional man, nor the master mechanic, but only the town's faithful agent, the school-committee man. Nor, as such agent, will he sit by with listless inattention, leaving it to the teacher to put his inquiries in the form adapted, either to show the proficiency or to conceal the ignorance of his pupils, as circumstances may appear to require. If this is to be his manner of visiting, he may as well send a plaster cast of himself, and stay at home. But, worst of all, let him not be looking, ever and again, at his watch, to see if the time has not arrived, or nearly arrived, when another engagement, at another place, will require his attendance. If he cannot leave these things behind,—I repeat it,—he may as well, for the good that will come of his visit, stay behind himself. In the emphatic language of Scripture, he should leave the dead to bury the dead without, and be himself only alive to the living, active spirits which are assembled around him. While at the schoolhouse, he should be there body and soul—there, and no where else.

For what is he to do while there? and what is the great good to be effected by his coming? Not mainly to exercise his critical sagacity in detecting the errors of the scholars, should errors be committed, or in propounding such questions as shall put to the severest test the accuracy and thoroughness of their scholarship, though it is well that this should be done, and often done; but it is to manifest his interest in their progress, and the sympathy which he feels with teacher and pupil in their efforts. You may take all possible precaution to secure the services of a qualified instructor, and may succeed in procuring such a one; but it is the interest felt in the success of his labors, and exhibited by thus frequently visiting the school to witness them, that will do more than all else toward continuing him such as you would have him to be. Nothing is more true, than that the best teacher will be made better by knowing that the eye of supervision is

upon him, and that he will deteriorate when it is no longer there. That man must be something more than mortal, who will not relax his exertions and grow weary, even of well-doing, when he finds little or no sympathy manifested by those who are set to counsel, and watch over him. If he has deserved it, he is entitled to their encouragement and approbation. It is his just due. If he is wanting in any part of his duty, admonition should not be withheld. In either event, the necessity of a supervision, which can be exercised in no other way than by frequently visiting the schools, is too apparent to admit of room for proof or argument.

And if the sympathetic regard of the visiter will thus animate the teacher in the discharge of his allotted duties, with how much more efficiency may we expect it to operate on the mind of the pupil! He has not yet learned, by the lessons of experience, the advantages to be realized, from the acquisitions he is making, from the habits he is acquiring. He sees them only in the dim visions of the future. In trust and confidence he looks to those on whom his inexperience has been accustomed to rely to cheer him onward in his progress. If these should keep aloof from him, testifying by their continued absence from the arena in which he is struggling for the prize—not of victory, but of wisdom and knowledge,—that his progress in improvement is of less account in their view than the many other things in which he sees that they do take an active personal interest, can we expect him to appreciate his advantages, valuing them as they should be valued, and consequently improving to the utmost the privileges he enjoys? No,—if we expect him to value them, we must first show him that we set a value on them, ourselves; we must be there at the right season to convince him that our hearts are sometimes there, to participate in the joys of his success, and to share in the regret which must ever accompany his failure; to light up his countenance with the smile of approbation whenever that can be rightly bestowed, and by gentle admonition to bring him again to the way in which he should go, when he has strayed from it. How many and how powerful are the influences which such a visiter, alive to the opportunities and the responsibilities of his station, may exercise, none but he who has faithfully improved them in the conscientious discharge of a solemn duty, and has witnessed the effect produced on his own mind, and on the susceptible minds of his young friends, can ever know.

I have said, that if the school-committee man or the trustee cannot find time for the performance of these duties, he ought not to assume them by accepting the trust confided to him. But let him not too hastily decide that he cannot find time; let him first examine his present appropriation of it, carefully. He may find that he spends an occasional hour at the news-room, or some other place of common resort, with less profit to himself, and with far less satisfaction in the retrospect, than he might have spent it in the village school. And if he should thus find that he can obtain the requisite time for performing these duties, without omitting others which are of equal importance,—nay, without omitting those which are of any importance at all,—then let him renew his energies, and buckle on his armor for the service. Let him forego those indulgences that are not essential to his happiness, and resolve to enter upon the conscientious discharge of the whole

trust reposed in him, and he may rely upon this—that it will prove its own abundant reward ; and that every little sacrifice which he may have occasion to make, will be repaid to him fourfold. And yet I know there are some who cannot find leisure for performing these services ; the calls upon their time for other duties are loud and imperative, and they must be obeyed. Such stand acquitted from all obligation on this account ; it is only asked that trivial excuses should not be interposed to shield any of us who can lend our aid, and are in a good degree qualified for the service, from the discharge of this great public duty.

In this connection a word of counsel may be extended to the electors in our towns and districts, by whom the school committees are chosen, and to those persons on whom it devolves to fill the vacancies that occur in our Boards of Trustees. It is a trust of high responsibility that is committed to your charge. You must be aware of this. Choose, then, men that are qualified by education and character, and the position they occupy in society, to fill the stations you assign to them ; choose men that can find time to perform all the duties that belong to the office ; choose those that feel an interest in the matter, for these will find time to visit the schools, to become acquainted with their progress, and to extend counsel and advice, encouragement and approbation to teacher and learner, as the state of the school may require. In a word, choose competent and conscientious men, for by these, and by none other, will the work you appoint them to do, be faithfully and thoroughly performed.

We have thus far endeavored to urge upon school committees the necessity of a vigilant attention to the trusts reposed in them, and especially of keeping themselves, by frequent personal examination, fully informed of the condition of the schools, and the progress of the pupils. But we have already said, that the performance of this duty should by no means be restricted to the limited number that usually constitutes the school committee. Every parent who has a child in the school, should feel interest enough in his welfare to make visits, not few nor far between, to the place where so much of the time of that child is spent, and where his future character, to a very great degree, is moulding into form. Let him, with a parent's anxiousness, watch the pressure upon it, at school as well as at home, taking care that the work may not be marred upon the wheel, nor distorted under the unskilful or too careless hand of the former, ere it has had time to harden into consistency. Tell me not that you cannot find time to do so much as this will require. I cannot credit it. If the parental feeling be alive within you, if the relation which I have supposed to exist between you and the pupil, be a real, and not an assumed one, you will find time. Something else will be omitted that this may be done. You will be seen there, to show both teacher and pupil by your presence, that whatever may be the indifference of others, the parent surely feels a deep interest, and cannot be satisfied without knowing what is done day after day, and week after week, at the schoolhouse.

Nor is your imperfect acquaintance with the studies pursued, and your supposed incompetency, on that account, to judge of the progress made in them, to stand you in stead, and plead your excuse for neglecting this duty. That is a false modesty which would shrink from the performance of the most solemn obligations, sheltering itself behind

a barrier like this. A few persons are sufficient, and it is hoped there may always be found on the school committee some who are competent to the task of examining critically and carefully the proficiency which the scholars have made in their respective studies. It is not for this alone, nor is it chiefly for this, that we call upon parents to come up and visit the schools. It is,—I repeat it,—your sympathy with those who are performing their daily functions at the school, and not your skill and acuteness, in examining the progress which they have made, that is called for. The teacher wants this evidence, that you realize it to be an all-important work that you have appointed him to do. The pupil requires this evidence, and with it he goes to his task with a keener zest, and an ardor unfelt before; for your inspiring presence has told him, in language that he can understand and cannot mistake, that his advancement in knowledge and virtue is the fondly cherished wish of your heart, and his surest passport to a father's blessing.

Give me now your attention for a moment, while I direct it upon yonder "playful children just let loose from school." They have just passed through the ordeal of an examination, and come forth all life and elasticity, for the happy holidays are now before them. One is relating to his fellows the story of his own performances, and showing, by the buoyancy of his spirits, how cheering to him was the smile of approbation which they called forth. Mark now his glistening eye and accent of triumph and gladness, as he crowns the narrative by saying, "My father, too, was there!"

A few words more to a class, to which some allusion has already been made. There are, in all our towns and villages, some persons of leisure and competence, who are willing to employ no inconsiderable portion of their leisure and their means in bettering the condition of the community in which they live. Some of these, it may reasonably be expected, will be placed upon the school committees by their fellow-citizens; and thus the field for their labor, the appropriate sphere of their action, will be pointed out to them. But others will not be placed in these official stations. We are too well acquainted with the variety of circumstances which are brought to bear upon our popular elections, with the many local and other partial considerations that influence and control the selection of candidates for office, not to know that the persons best qualified to discharge the duties of an official station, frequently fail of being elected to the trust. To these I would say, Where can you find a more inviting field for your labors, than is furnished by our public schools? Look around you on every side, and discover, if you can, where is the opportunity for doing greater good. You will look in vain, finding none. Embrace this then, I beseech you, and enter upon the work, as volunteers in a noble cause. Perhaps you may be disposed so to do, but are hesitating and shrinking back, that you may not subject yourselves to the charge of improperly interfering with the business of others, of intermeddling with what does not belong to you. This should deter you from all interference with the regulations by which the schools are governed, from attempting to direct, in any way, what shall be taught, or what shall not be taught in them. But without doing any thing like this, you will find ample room and scope enough for your exertions, in examining the progress of the pupils, in extending a word of encouragement to teacher and scholar, when it is merited,

of admonition, too, if need be, in showing them by your frequent visits, and your devotedness to the occupation, that you consider the public schools among the most important institutions of the land, and that for that reason, you have believed the sphere of your usefulness to be there. Can such visits to our schools,—voluntary let it be understood that they are,—be made to no good purpose? Can they prove to be only labor thrown away? Will they not rather be as seed sown in good ground, taking root and springing upward into a tree which shall prosper and bear much fruit, and afford shelter to the tender plants which are growing beneath its protecting shade? The mind of that committee man must be of strange temperament indeed, who would complain of this as an officious interference; who would not rather rejoice and be thankful for the beneficent kindness which had brought him such aid in the discharge of his high and arduous trust.

Does the kindling zeal of the patriot seek for the field in which he may exert himself most successfully to promote the prosperity of his country? Does the philanthropist, devoted to the welfare of his race, ask where he may toil in the cause and expect the greatest practical result to crown his efforts? Let them both go into the schools, and find their employment there. They may labor earnestly, but it will be with comparatively little effect, on minds that are already hardened into manhood, and upon which faint impressions, and such as are easy to be erased, are all that can be made. But when they act upon the plastic mind of youth, it will be with intenser energy; and deep and lasting impressions will be made upon the spirits that are preparing to control, for good or for evil, as the issue may be, the destinies of the succeeding generation.

Let no one deceive himself by supposing, that what has now been said, is unwarranted or uncalled for by the existence of any present evil, or that I have placed in undue prominence this matter of negligence in visiting our schools. It is a great and crying evil, in the practical operation of our school system. It may not exist to the extent I have supposed, in some of our large and more compact towns and cities. I should be happy in believing that in some of these it is wholly obviated. It is more practicable, in such places, to devolve the duty of visiting the schools upon one or more persons, whose chief business it shall be to attend to this duty. Thus the schools will be visited, and the examinations attended to. But in our smaller villages and country towns, as well as in many of the larger towns, the committees are the only official visitors. And in no event, for the reasons which have already been given, should the parental and voluntary visits that have been here recommended, be dispensed with.

It has already been suggested, that these remarks are not made at random, nor without some experience in the matters of which we have been treating. I have served my fellow-citizens, for many years, both as an instructor and a visiter of their schools, and if life and health be spared me, I hope to serve them in the latter employment, yet many more. In the former capacity, I have known what it was to be animated and encouraged in the performance of duties, sometimes arduous, but rarely or never irksome, by the cheering presence and sympathy of visiting committees. I have seen this influence operating upon the minds of the youth under my charge, gentle, and tender, and easily

wrought upon, with evidently still deeper effect than was produced upon my own. And I have thought, if the visitors could see as I have seen, and realize as I have realized, the blessed influence upon their young spirits, of the kind regard and interest manifested in their improvement, trivial causes would never again be permitted to interfere with the discharge of these beneficent duties. I have known, also, what it was to feel neglected and forgotten by the guardians who were set to watch over us,—to prepare for a school examination, perhaps by direction of the committee, and when all was anxious expectation on our part, to have none, or next to none, of them remember the hour of their own appointment; while the little flock under my charge were feeling this neglect more deeply and more keenly than even I could feel it. Such things should not be, and if the bursting and overflowing feelings of the child, at these seasons, could be poured in their full tide of bitterness and disappointment upon the mind of the delinquent visitor, such things could not be.

In the latter capacity also, that of visiting committee, the writer of this article claims to have done some service. He makes no pretension of having performed it with that full measure of faithfulness which he has here recommended. He is conscious that it has been far otherwise; that trivial considerations,—trivial in comparison at least,—have been permitted to interfere, and the visiting of the schools has been neglected in consequence. He will take to his own share a full measure of all the reproof and admonition which have been bestowed, knowing that there it rightfully belongs. And therefore, without claiming any exemption from the weaknesses and imperfections of our common nature, but fully acknowledging them all, he may be permitted to say, that he has sometimes been enabled to discharge his appointed duty, in these respects, as it should always be done, having entered upon it in good earnest,—*con amore*,* and with his whole soul; that in almost every instance in which this has been done, a sympathetic chord has been touched in the hearts of the pupils, and he has had the satisfaction to know, by this evidence, that such labors were not bestowed in vain. Or, if this evidence has been ever withheld, and no such chord has vibrated, he has still reaped, in the consciousness of having discharged to the best of his knowledge and ability, an important trust, a rich and ample reward which no man could take away.

The preparation of the brief remarks which have now been offered, has been unavoidably deferred, by the pressure of other avocations, almost to the very last moment. In them, I have been desirous of showing, that with whatever diligence and assiduity the other duties which belong to the trustee, or the member of the school committee, may be performed, if he neglects the primary duty of visiting and examining the schools under his care, his work will not be half accomplished. And not until this part of his duty shall be frequently, and heartily, and perseveringly attended to, can it be said to be well accomplished. If I have been able to bring home to the minds of any who have now listened to me, the urgency of this duty, and the wrong that is done by neglecting it, in clearer and stronger light than that in which they have been accustomed to regard it hitherto, that which was purposed has been attained, and therewith shall I be satisfied.

[From the Cabinet and Visiter.]

To the Editor of the Cabinet and Visiter.

SIR, — A word to schoolmasters. The efforts made in this State, in behalf of Common Schools, within the last few years, have not been fruitless. Teachers have felt the stimulus; and their diligence, in successful preparation for the work, proves how easy it is for a generous public to remunerate itself. The Common-School law has taxed the rich to educate the children of the poor. But the improvement which the very operation of this law has excited in our teachers, has, only by the ability to teach a greater amount for a given sum of money, been more than a double compensation for the school tax. So much for encouragement.

One prevalent delinquency, however, among teachers, should be noticed; and if *noticing* be not enough, I promise you the delinquent teacher shall hear the thunder of reform. It is a matter worthy of censure, as much so as quackery in medicine, or ignorance in the profession of law. I mean the butcheries our teachers daily perpetrate in their schoolrooms. Not the blood they shed with the ferule or the birch; but the dreadful havoc they habitually make of our mother English.

I send my boy to school to learn the English language. He learns from his grammar, that "a verb should agree with its nominative case;" that *these* and *those* are demonstratives; that *them* is the objective case, plural, of the third person, of the personal pronouns. Very well; this is right. It is what I wish him to learn; but, when he has learned it, in his grammar, I do not wish him to unlearn it, in his teacher. What shall it avail, that my boy shall learn these lessons, in his book, and, during the very recitation of them, his master shall, by his example, teach him that they are of no practical use? The grammar tells him to say, *those* books, *those* rules. The master says, and thus teaches him to say, *them* books, *them* rules. The grammar tells him, "the verb must agree with its nominative." The master says, and thus teaches him to say, "You *daresn't* do it." The grammar tells him, that *ought* is a defective verb, which admits of no auxiliary. The master, by his slovenly, stupid example, tells him to say, and, of course, to write, "You *HAD ought*," and "They *HADN'T ought*." The grammar teaches him to say, "*I did not think it was she.*" The master says, "*I did not think it was HER.*" The grammar teaches him to say, "*Between you and me.*" The master says, "*Between you and I.*" The grammar teaches him to say, "*He did it.*" The master, in imitation of the prinking knights of the pin-box in New York, "*He DONE it.*"

Now, what do I, or what does my boy, gain by all this learning in the grammar, and unlearning from the teacher, this doing and undoing, this worse than waste of time? What consideration do I get from such a teacher for the money I pay him? None: he inflicts a positive injury on my child. He ought to be fined; at least, he ought not to be paid for what he has not done,—least of all, for mischief he has done.

Do we pay the lawyer who has, ignorantly or stupidly, brought the wrong action for us in court? Do we pay the surgeon who has, igno-

rantly or carelessly, misplaced our broken bones? or the physician who has steamed us for the small-pox? And what comparison do my body, bones, and pelf, bear to the intellect of my children?

Let not the stupid charlatan who pretends to teach grammar, but talks gibberish, excuse himself by saying, "Grammatical accuracy is of little consequence, provided you make yourself understood." How else is he certain of being understood? To the scholars in an English school, there is no study so important as that of the English language; and there is no way of teaching it so important, as, by habitual example, to show the application of grammatical rules. In a word, there is no other way of teaching it.

The child thus taught is, at an early age, led to discriminate between congruities and incongruities,—to think and to reason accurately. Yet there is no need of a continual criticism upon the diction of the child. The instructor is bound to teach grammatical accuracy in the conversation of his scholars. The selection of words—the choice of the phraseology adapted to different subjects and occasions—may be left to the growing judgment of the child.

THRIFTY.

PUBLIC INSTRUCTION.

[From the Commercial Advertiser.]

Among the recommendations to be approved, in Governor Marcy's annual message, was that touching the formation of circulating libraries in the several school districts throughout the State. It strikes us as a suggestion of very great importance. It is the province of the elementary school to fit its pupils *to understand* books; and if, when thus prepared to read, the children and youth of our Common Schools—those who are to form the great body of the people—can be, as it were, gratuitously provided with an ample range of simple, interesting, and instructive works, embracing the general range of such knowledge as shall be most useful, then will the rising generation of this State be better supplied with food for the mind than any other people in Christendom. The subject deserves the immediate consideration of the Legislature. New Jersey, too, now so thoroughly aroused upon the subject, might at once lend a coöperating hand. O that we were rich! Then fifteen thousand dollars, for such a noble object, should be wanting no longer than it would take to draw a check! Does any gentleman of wealth desire to live in the grateful remembrance of posterity, as a public benefactor, let him endow the Common School Circulating Library.

It is because men have formed an erroneous estimate of the value of property, and the evil of poverty, that they are disposed to deny God and turn atheists, because they sometimes see bad men rich, and good men poor.